

**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE No. 2
RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO WORKFORCE ISSUES, WORKPLACE
CULTURE AND FUNDING CONSIDERATIONS FOR REMOTE, RURAL AND
REGIONAL HEALTH**

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My submission is in relation to Report 57, Finding 9 and Finding 11 and specifically with regards to paramedic shortages and retention. My experience in this comes from being a NSW Ambulance paramedic in Brewarrina for 12 years and the Station Officer for 8 years.

As part of your review of working conditions, contracts and incentives I would like to put forward that one major issue that needs to be addressed is the lack of housing supplied to paramedics. Unlike police and teachers, NSW Ambulance paramedics are not supplied housing. Why is it that paramedics are not part of the NSW Government Housing Services Police and Teacher Housing? Or that NSW Health does not supply housing as it does for nurses? Paramedics are expected to source their own housing in rural towns where rental properties are minimally, if at all, available, are mostly in extremely poor condition, offer little in security or comfort, and are at exorbitantly high costs. This contributes in an enormous way to attracting paramedics to remote towns, and to retaining paramedics that have been posted to them.

There are ambulance stations in remote towns where staff posted to them refuse to come due to lack of a place to live, Collarenebri has many examples of this happening. At many other stations where paramedics are posted and do come, they often don't stay beyond a couple of months and transfer out as soon as they possibly can. And who can blame them when the most basic need, a roof over their head, is not supplied to them. They are forced while they are here to live either in sub-standard accommodation, or have to share homes with several others, and there have been many occasions where paramedics have had to "couch surf" until they can find a place of their own to live, and this can even come to having to live in the local pub accommodation.

None of these options are even remotely suitable for a workforce that mostly work 24/7 for eight days straight at a time. You will never attract or retain paramedics in remote towns while this issue remains the standard.